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ABSTRACT

This document examines the following aspects of the federal administration of evaluation, program improvement, and technical assistance under Chapter 1 of the Education Consolidation and Improvement Act: (1) changes in each of the three areas since 1981 when Chapter 1 replaced Title I of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act; (2) activities currently conducted in the United States Department of Education (ED) in each area; and (3) problems and opportunities experienced in the federal administration of evaluation, program improvement, and technical assistance. Among the conclusions are the following: (1) ED has encouraged state and local educational agencies (SEAs and LEAs) to continue collecting data on project effectiveness and participant characteristics using the evaluation system mandated under Title I; (2) reports of errors in the research design, collection, and reporting of achievement data suggest that ED should assess the quality of those data to determine if changes are needed; (3) problems in the federal administration of the improvement initiative arise from the voluntary nature of state and local activities to improve Chapter 1 quality, that is not the SEAs' central purpose; and (4) Technical Assistance Center performance in assisting SEAs and LEAs in program improvement has been limited by constraints on their resources, low levels of interest, and the structure of the Chapter 1 program. Data are presented on three tables; a list of references is included. (BJV)

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THE FEDERAL ADMINISTRATION OF EVALUATION, PROGRAM IMPROVEMENT, AND TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE UNDER ECIA CHAPTER 1

March 1987

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Prepared for the National Assessment of ECIA Chapter 1,
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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This study examined the federal administration of evaluation, program improvement, and technical assistance under Chapter 1 of the Education Consolidation and Improvement Act (ECIA). In particular, it reviewed (1) changes in each of the three areas since 1981 when Chapter 1 replaced Title I of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, (2) activities the U.S. Department of Education (ED) currently conducts in each area, and (3) problems and opportunities experienced in the federal administration of evaluation, program improvement, and technical assistance.

These federal activities were reviewed in a single study because they share certain important features. The most important is their capacity to shape and change Chapter 1 services at the local level, even though the relevant statutory provisions impose relatively few actual requirements on state and local educational agencies (SEAs and LEAs). Unlike other areas of Chapter 1 administration, federal activities in evaluation, program improvement, and technical assistance are intended to provide SEAs and LEAs with encouragement, ideas, and practical methods, not just mandates, for assessing and improving the effectiveness of Chapter 1 services.

Federal Administration of Chapter 1 Evaluation

Chapter 1, as amended, requires SEAs and LEAs to evaluate their Chapter 1 services, although ECIA allows educational agencies greater discretion in the design of their evaluations than was permitted

report information on the characteristics of students receiving Chapter 1 services. ED has encouraged agencies to continue collecting data on project effectiveness and participant characteristics using the evaluation system mandated under Title I. Federal program review teams monitor state implementation of Chapter 1 evaluation procedures (although this information is not routinely fed back to the ED office with lead responsibility for program evaluation). For the most recent reporting cycle, 45 of the 53 SEAs submitted Chapter 1 achievement data that could be aggregated and analyzed nationally, and all SEAs submitted at least some data on Chapter 1 participants.

Reports of errors in the research design, collection, and reporting of Chapter 1 achievement data suggest that ED should assess the quality of those data to determine if changes are needed. In light of the federal uses of Chapter 1 achievement and participation data, Congress and ED should also assess how these data are being used by SEAs and LEAs, to determine if (1) changes are needed to ensure greater accuracy and to make the data more relevant to state and local administrative needs and (2) the level of use justifies the federal, state, and local expenditures for operation of the current data collection and reporting system. (For example, the low reported use of mandated age and gender data on Chapter 1 participants suggests that these data requirements should be reviewed.)

Federal Sponsorship of Program Improvement Under Chapter 1

A major new initiative in Chapter 1 since 1981 is the implementation of activities intended to promote instructional improvement in Chapter 1 projects. This initiative has had three purposes, including (1) the general upgrading of Chapter 1 instruction, based on principles described in the "effective schools" research; (2) the provision of intensive assistance to selected Chapter 1 projects that have particularly poor records of performance; and (3) the use of evaluation to identify needs and suggest strategies for improving the achievement of Chapter 1 participants.

ED has implemented this initiative through (1) the award of small grants to SEAs for designing and disseminating approaches to improve project quality, (2) the identification and recognition of 246 projects judged to provide particularly successful Chapter 1 services, and (3) increases in the availability of technical assistance for improving the quality of Chapter 1 services.

Problems in the federal administration of the improvement initiative arise from the voluntary nature of state and local activities to improve Chapter 1 quality. Because upgrading Chapter 1 instruction has never been a central purpose of the state administrative mission, SEAs may be reluctant to commit scarce resources to it, especially since this new federal emphasis has not reduced their responsibilities for ensuring local compliance with Chapter 1's legal requirements. Limits on federal and state resources available for improvement have meant that much of the impetus for these activities must come from the broader educational reform movement, which states and school

systems have adopted in varying ways and with varying levels of intensity. A major challenge confronting federal Chapter 1 administrators is to find ways to encourage linkages between the Chapter 1 improvement initiative and state efforts to achieve broader reform objectives.

Federal Provision of Chapter 1 Technical Assistance

In addition to providing technical assistance in interpreting and complying with program requirements, ED delivers technical assistance through its sponsorship of the Technical Assistance Centers (TACs), which are currently funded at an annual total of $3.6 million. Although initially established to assist in the adoption and implementation of the Title I evaluation and reporting system, the TACs now also have major responsibilities for the implementation of the Chapter 1 program improvement initiative. Indeed, this study found that the TACs serve as the main link between ED and state and local practitioners in promoting and implementing both program improvement and evaluation.

Current evidence indicates that the TACs are implementing the program improvement responsibilities assigned to them, as well as their earlier assigned responsibilities for evaluation. TAC performance in assisting SEAs and LEAs in program improvement has been limited, however, by (1) constraints on their resources and on state funds available to carry out program improvement activities, (2) low levels of interest and commitment to improving Chapter 1 programs in some states, and (3) the categorical structure of the Chapter 1 program, in which only certain students are served within a school and not the

whole school. Despite these limitations, however, Chapter 1 coordinators indicate satisfaction with the quality of the TACs' assistance in both evaluation and program improvement.

THE FEDERAL ADMINISTRATION OF EVALUATION, PROGRAM IMPROVEMENT, AND TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE UNDER ECIA CHAPTER 1

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I. INTRODUCTION

This study examined the federal administration of evaluation, program improvement, and technical assistance under Chapter 1 of the Education Consolidation and Improvement Act (ECIA). In particular, the study sought to identify and describe the federal administrative methods that are used in these three areas to advance the goals set for the implementation of the Chapter 1 basic grants program.

This section of the report describes (1) the purposes of the study; (2) the research design; (3) the legal framework for evaluation, program improvement, and technical assistance; and (4) the organization of the report.

Purposes of the Study

This is one of four studies of Chapter 1's federal administration conducted for the National Assessment of ECIA Chapter 1. The other three studies review (1) selected aspects of Chapter 1's legal framework, (2) federal staffing and budgeting policies affecting the administration of Chapter 1, and (3) federal compliance and oversight activities under Chapter 1.

The descriptive information reported in this study supplements other information developed for the National Assessment of ECIA Chapter 1 in two respects. First, in conjunction with the studies just described, it describes the most important federal administrative activities under Chapter 1. Second, it complements information on Chapter 1 evaluation, program improvement, and technical assistance contained in the Assessment's studies of Chapter 1

implementation at state and local levels. (See especially Farrar & Millsap, 1986, and Knapp, Turnbull, Blakely, Jay, Marks, & Shields, 1986.)

With a few exceptions, this report does not describe the state and local implementation of federal requirements and priorities in evaluation, program improvement, or technical assistance. In order to obtain a complete picture of the operation of these activities under Chapter 1, it would be necessary to examine our data and findings in combination with the information obtained in the Chapter 1 studies that focused on state and local operations.

Federal activities in evaluation, program improvement, and technical assistance can shape and change Chapter 1 services, even though the statutory provisions authorizing these activities are not as prescriptive as other Chapter 1 components. Instead, these federal activities are intended to provide state and local educational agencies (SEAs and LEAs) with encouragement, ideas, and practical methods, not just mandates, for assessing and improving the effectiveness of Chapter 1 services.

To learn more about these federal activities, the study asked several general questions about each of the three functional areas:

- What changes have occurred in each area of federal administration since 1981?
- What activities does the U.S. Department of Education (ED) currently carry out in each area?
- What opportunities and problems do federal respondents experience in connection with their work in each area?

This report presents the answers we found to these questions.

Study Design

The research design we used in the study had three parts:

1. Review of research literature and other data

We examined articles and reports describing federal requirements and practices in evaluation, program improvement, and technical assistance since the enactment of Title I of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), the predecessor of ECIA Chapter 1. In particular, we looked for information on the strategies adopted to implement each area and the priority attached to each in the overall administration of the federal compensatory education program. Among the documents that we reviewed were reports on the design and implementation of the Title I/Chapter 1 Evaluation and Reporting System (TIERS) and the Title I/Chapter 1 Technical Assistance Centers (TACs).

2. Interviews with persons responsible for Chapter 1 federal administration

Among the 36 persons interviewed for the study were 25 federal officials (including congressional staff members) involved in the administration or oversight of the areas under review. In addition, we interviewed the directors of all four TACs, heads of the TAC area offices, and several state Chapter 1 coordinators. We also talked with other persons who have either conducted research in the areas of interest to us or have first-hand familiarity with the topics addressed in this study.

3. Data analysis

We analyzed the information obtained through interviews and the review of documents in light of the three questions listed earlier.

In several instances we constructed longitudinal analyses to determine how certain activities had changed over time. Finally, we integrated the results of all analyses to develop the study's conclusions.

Current Legal Framework for Federal Administrative Activities in Evaluation, Program Improvement, and Technical Assistance[1]

The Chapter 1 law and regulations establish the structure for federal activities in evaluation, program improvement, and technical assistance. The requirements in each of these areas are described below.

Evaluation Provisions

More detailed federal requirements apply to evaluation than to improving program quality or providing technical assistance. ECIA Chapter 1 requires SEAs to evaluate programs receiving Chapter 1 assistance. Section 555(e) states that each SEA shall:

> (1) conduct an evaluation of the programs assisted under this chapter at least every two years and shall make public the results of that evaluation; and
>
> (2) collect data on the race, age, and gender of children served by the programs assisted under this chapter and on the number of children served by grade level under the programs assisted under this chapter.

In addition, as stated in Section 555(d), each SEA must "keep such records and provide such information to the Secretary as may be

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[1] This discussion of legal requirements is based, in part, on the report on selected aspects of the Chapter 1 legal framework (Gaffney & Schember, in draft, January 1987).

required for fiscal audit and program evaluation." Section 591(b) of ECIA, however, prohibits the Secretary from issuing regulations "relating to the details of . . . evaluating programs and projects by state and local educational agencies."

In response to Section 555(e), Chapter 1 regulations essentially repeat the statute (as cited in the next paragraph) in their direction that states may fulfill the evaluation requirements by aggregating evaluation data from LEAs' "objective measurements of educational achievement in basic skills" and reporting statewide totals. The regulations also reiterate the statutory requirement that SEAs must annually collect and report data on Chapter 1 participants' race, age, gender, and grade level. Although the statute does not specify the frequency of this data collection and reporting, the regulations require that the data be obtained and reported annually. (As described in Section II of this report, these participant data are to be reported to ED in a specified format.)

Section 556(b)(4) of the statute states that an LEA receiving Chapter 1 assistance must assure that its programs and projects:

> . . . will be evaluated in terms of their effectiveness in achieving the goals set for them, and that such evaluations shall include objective measurements of educational achievement in basic skills and a determination of whether improved performance is sustained over a period of more than one year; and that the results of such evaluation will be considered by such agency in the improvement of the programs and projects assisted under this chapter.

The regulations require that an LEA conduct such an evaluation at least once every three years. Additional requirements for evaluation are imposed on Chapter 1 schoolwide projects.

By cross-referencing the LEA statutory requirements in the federal regulations on SEA evaluations, ED is suggesting--but not mandating--that SEAs meet their statutory evaluation requirement by aggregating LEAs' "objective measurements of educational achievement." Since an LEA must conduct such an evaluation only once every three years, an SEA that bases its own evaluation on LEA data must coordinate LEA schedules statewide, in order to be certain that its own biennial report contains the achievement results from a representative sample of Chapter 1 programs.

The Chapter 1 1983 Nonregulatory Guidance (NRG) states that SEAs will "approv[e LEAs'] evaluation designs that meet Chapter 1 requirements" and that the "models described in [Title I regulations] are appropriate evaluation designs, . . . [but] the Department does not require the use of those, or any other, particular models."[2] The NRG issued in 1986 also states that SEAs, to meet their own evaluation obligations, "may wish to require that . . . LEAs use specific instruments to measure achievement or specific evaluation designs."

Program Improvement Provisions

Encouragement for improving Chapter 1 programs is a feature of Section 556(b)(4), cited above, requiring LEAs to consider evaluation results in improving their project activities. In addition, Section 556(b)(3) of the law requires LEAs to assure that their Chapter 1 programs "are of sufficient size, scope, and quality to give reasonable promise of substantial progress toward meeting the special

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[2] The Title I evaluation models are described in Section II of this report.

educational needs of the children being served. . . ." These statements constitute the legislative authority for federal and state attention to instructional quality issues.

Technical Assistance Provisions

Section 591 of ECIA, which limits the Secretary's regulatory authority as cited above, also states:

> [I]n all other matters relating to the details of planning, developing, implementing, and evaluating programs and projects by state and local educational agencies the Secretary . . . may . . ., upon request, provide technical assistance, information, and suggested guidelines designed to promote the development and implementation of effective instructional programs and to otherwise assist in carrying out the purposes of this subtitle.

Organization of the Report

This report contains four additional sections. Section II describes the federal administration of Chapter 1 evaluation activities conducted at state and local levels. Section III presents information on Chapter 1's federally administered activities in program improvement. Section IV describes the federal administration of Chapter 1 technical assistance activities. Section V summarizes the conclusions of the study.

II. FEDERAL ADMINISTRATION OF CHAPTER 1 EVALUATION

Program and project evaluation have been central features of the federal compensatory education program since the 1965 enactment of Title I, when Sen. Robert F. Kennedy added the requirement that LEAs evaluate the effectiveness of their projects in serving educationally deprived children. In the intervening years, federal responsibilities in evaluation have experienced several shifts, resulting in the current federal administrative role that is in many ways a hybrid of what has gone before. Federal requirements for state and local evaluation have focused on two general types of information--the achievement outcomes of Chapter 1 students and certain descriptive data on Chapter 1 participants, including the subject areas in which they receive Chapter 1 services, numbers of Chapter 1 participants enrolled in public and nonpublic schools, and participants' grade level, racial/ethnic group affiliation, age, and gender.

In this section, we describe (1) the major changes since 1981 in the federal administration of Chapter 1 evaluation, (2) the evaluation activities ED currently carries out, and (3) the opportunities and problems characterizing this area of federal administration.

Changes Since 1981 in the Federal Administration of Chapter 1 Evaluation

ECIA's statutory provisions signaled important changes in the federal administrative role in evaluating federally assisted compensatory education services. The 1983 ECIA Technical Amendments and ED

actions in administering Chapter 1 have, however, combined to lessen the effect of the changes mandated in 1981.

Legislative Mandate for Change

The philosophy of administrative simplification embodied in ECIA affected evaluation as much as any other area of Title I administration. Most importantly, ECIA repealed the Title I requirements (1) that SEAs and LEAs use the evaluation models (known as the RMC models, denoting the contractor responsible for their development) that had been mandatory since the 1979-80 school year[3] and (2) that SEAs report evaluation results using the TIERS format and metric.[4] In addition, ECIA repealed the Title I requirement that the federal government provide technical assistance to SEAs "to enable them to assist LEAs in the development and application of a systematic evaluation of programs in accordance with the models" (Section 183(e) of ESEA Title I, as amended).

ECIA also eliminated or changed other evaluation related provisions that the 1983 ECIA Technical Amendments later reimposed. These included the requirements that LEAs use evaluation results to improve their Chapter 1 activities and that SEAs collect evaluation

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[3] School year 1981-82 was the final year that the law required SEAs to collect achievement data using the RMC models and the TIERS format.

[4] Under TIERS, SEAs annually collect and report the following information by grade level and subject area (i.e., reading, mathematics, and language arts): number of students tested, number of students with both pretest and posttest scores, test interval, and posttest scores and gains. Gains are reported using a standard reporting metric developed for TIERS--the normal curve equivalent (NCE). Use of this standard metric permits scores to be aggregated across tests, districts, and states.

data from Chapter 1 projects within their states. The Technical Amendments also restored the requirement that states collect information on the grade level and racial/ethnic characteristics of Chapter 1 participants, information that had been included in the TIERS reports before 1981; in addition, the Amendments also required that SEAs collect data on participants' age and gender, which had not been required under Title I.

The Technical Amendments, however, did not reimpose the mandatory use of the RMC models or the TIERS reporting format.

Federal Implementation of ECIA

ED implemented the requirements of ECIA, including those of the 1983 Technical Amendments. As described in the following pages, the administrative actions taken by ED (directed by the Department's Planning and Evaluation Service--PES) indicated assumptions that (1) ECIA was not likely to reduce congressional interest in monitoring the effectiveness of Chapter 1 and (2) the new law would not diminish the utility of state and local assessments regarding the outcomes of their compensatory education services. So, with the encouragement of groups such as the Chapter 1 state coordinators, PES and ED's Compensatory Education Programs (CEP) staff urged SEAs and LEAs to continue using the Title I evaluation system.

ED's Current Administrative Activities in Chapter 1 Evaluation

ED's main current activities in the administration of state and local Chapter 1 evaluation activities are (1) encouraging the continued use of the RMC models and the TIERS reporting format, (2)

sponsoring TAC services, (3) monitoring the state and local implementation of the Chapter 1 evaluation requirements (including the use of evaluation results to improve instructional services), and (4) analyzing and reporting states' Chapter 1 participation and achievement data. These activities and the current ED administrative structure for evaluation are described below, followed by a discussion of ED's use of Chapter 1 evaluation data.

Responsibilities for federal administrative activities in evaluation are divided between PES and CEP. Because PES staff supervised the design of TIERS and the RMC models and continue to have lead responsibility for monitoring the TACs, PES plays a key role in Chapter 1 evaluation. CEP's role in Chapter 1 evaluation has grown in recent years, with the adoption of the Chapter 1 program improvement focus and the development of its in-house capacity to conduct quantitative analyses of states' evaluation and participation data.

Under current procedures, ED asks (but does not require) SEAs to submit annual statewide Chapter 1 achievement information in essentially the same categories used in TIERS.[5] ED's form (No. 686-2) for Chapter 1 state performance reports includes the following statement:

> The Department is interested in . . . grade level, number of students tested, number of students with pretest and posttest scores, test interval . . ., and posttest scores and gains, both reported according to some standard metric (e.g., normal curve equivalents).

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[5] Some states also send ED copies of their state Chapter 1 evaluation reports, which must be prepared every two years. When asked about their use of these reports, ED staff said the reports are examined when specific questions arise about a particular state.

The instructions note that "states which are continuing to aggregate achievement data according to the former Title I evaluation reporting system may submit such data aggregations."

The instructions do not advise SEAs on how they should coordinate their annual performance reports with LEAs' requirement to evaluate their programs once every three years. The ED reporting form does, however, ask the SEA if the achievement data are representative of the state as a whole. If the SEA responds that the data are representative, it is asked to provide a copy of the sampling plan. If not, it is asked to "provide a brief explanation of data limitations."

Under federal direction, the TACs continue to assist states in generating these data, as they have since 1976, despite the repeal of the Title I provision requiring federally sponsored technical assistance in evaluation. Although the TAC mission has expanded to include a new focus on Chapter 1 program improvement (as discussed in Section III of this report), TAC directors interviewed in this study indicate that at least half of the TACs' resources continue to be used for evaluation assistance.

Respondents from CEP report that they monitor SEAs' implementation of Chapter 1 evaluation requirements in their state program reviews. CEP's current program review guide (dated August 1985) addresses evaluation in several contexts, as follows:

- In the review of an SEA's monitoring of LEA applications and reports, program review teams are instructed to look for problems such as

  - -- no penalties for late or missing reports and
  - -- incomplete records.

- In the review of an SEA's evaluation procedures and records, they are to look for problems such as
  - -- lack of plans to develop and publish the state evaluation report,
  - -- no feedback to LEAs concerning their evaluations,
  - -- faulty interpretations or inappropriate use of data,
  - -- failure of LEAs to use evaluation results for program improvement, and
  - -- few sustained effects studies by LEAs.

The November 1985 summary of state program reviews, the most recent available, reports on CEP findings, recommendations, and corrective actions. Program reviewers found a wide range of problems in evaluation procedures and findings. At the SEA level these problems included the following:

- Lack of evidence that the SEA is using sustained gains information to target program improvement activities,
- Unexplained declines in third-grade test scores,
- LEAs' use of outdated forms of standardized tests,
- Improper sampling of LFAs, and
- Lack of systematic collection and use of evaluation data as a basis for SEA technical assistance on program improvement.

They noted the following problems at the LEA level:

- Lack of satisfactory explanation for decreases in test scores,

- Lack of satisfactory explanation for unrealistically high gains in achievement scores,
- Use of fall-to-spring testing rather than annual cycles, and
- Excessive expenditures for outside evaluators.

PES staff said that none of these problems had been brought to their attention nor communicated to the TACs, indicating a need for better communication between CEP and PES.

ED's current activities concerned with the analysis and reporting of states' Chapter 1 achievement and participant data reflect an interest in using these data to improve state Chapter 1 procedures. When CEP receives the state performance reports each year, staff compare the data contained in each report to the previous year's achievement and participant data submitted by the state, highlighting significant changes. These comparisons are sent to each state for their information, allowing the state to obtain immediate feedback and to correct any errors in its report that may have prompted an erroneous identification of "significant changes." Following this preliminary analysis, the state reports are forwarded to a private firm for more comprehensive analysis. The contractor prepares a national summary of the achievement and participation data and a report for each state, displaying the state's trends in Chapter 1 participation and achievement outcomes over time. (The most recent national summary report is Gutman & Henderson, February 1987 [in draft], which presents achievement and participation data for school year 1984-85.) CEP encourages SEAs to use the reports as a basis for assessing their own performance (by comparing the state's performance

trends to the nation's) and also as a basis for feedback to LEAs (by comparing each LEA's performance trends to the state's).

ED uses these evaluation data in several ways. In addition to assisting states to assess their Chapter 1 performance, ED also uses analyses of the TIERS data to reveal national patterns of Chapter 1 implementation and effects. Recently, the staff of the National Assessment of ECIA Chapter 1 used TIERS analyses as a basis for describing the effects of Chapter 1 services on the reading and mathematics achievement of Chapter 1 students (Kennedy, Birman, & Demaline, 1986). In addition, PES staff regularly include analyses of TIERS achievement and participation data in ED's annual evaluation report. (The most recent is cited as Office of Planning, Budget and Evaluation, FY 1985.) PES and CEP staff interviewed for this study said that TIERS data are also used in (1) preparing congressional testimony, (2) drafting speeches for delivery to national and local audiences, and (3) briefing CEP program review teams before they visit specific states.

Opportunities and Problems in the Federal Administration of Chapter 1 Evaluation

Current issues in the administration of Chapter 1 evaluation stem mainly from the uncertain purpose underlying these activities. Is ED encouraging states to continue collecting TIERS data with an intent that the aggregated data will present a national picture of the effectiveness of Chapter 1? Are the data intended mainly as a basis for SEAs' and LEAs' self-assessment and hence as a component of

federal efforts to promote Chapter 1 program improvement? Or are the two purposes equally important?

If the two purposes are equally important, the TIERS design may be the best approach for addressing the two goals through a single system. At the same time, other options are available to ED for meeting each goal. The following discussion outlines several problems in the current Chapter 1 evaluation system and notes possible alternatives to TIERS.

Problems in the Collection and Completeness of Evaluation Data Obtained by SEAs

The importance of reassessing federal policies in Chapter 1 evaluation is borne out by current trends in the SEAs' collection and reporting of Chapter 1 participation and achievement data and in the quality and completeness of the data submitted to ED.

School year 1979-80, the first year SEAs were required to report TIERS data, was the only year in which all 53 SEAs (50 states plus the District of Columbia, Puerto Rico, and the Bureau of Indian Affairs) reported participation and achievement data using the TIERS format. This high level of compliance reflects the fact that the TACs, the TIERS developers, and federal staff worked with SEAs for two years to prepare for the first year of mandatory data collection.

For the 1984-85 school year, the most recent year for which data have been submitted to ED, all 53 SEAs reported state participation data to ED. Although many states continue to report their achievement data to ED using the TIERS format, their number has decreased: 45 of the 53 SEAs reported achievement data in a format capable of

being analyzed and aggregated at the national level.[6] This figure is the lowest number of SEAs reporting usable Chapter 1 information (except for 1981-82, when ED did not ask SEAs to submit evaluation data). Additionally, of the 45 SEAs, many did not report outcome data at all grade levels at which Chapter 1 services were provided.

Evidence of problems in the quality and completeness of the data is growing. Based on his interviews with Chapter 1 state coordinators, Dougherty reports that "the most difficult problem in evaluation appears to be that of producing valid results and recognizing when results are not valid" (1986, p. 151). Indeed, virtually all of the federal staff involved in the collection and analysis of Chapter 1 achievement and participation data report examples of serious problems.[7] For example:

- One state combines reports on all grade levels, making it impossible to separate average achievement gains for the primary grades from those for other grades.

- Another very small state aggregates data from only a sample of its districts, even though the state's small total number of districts technically precludes any sampling.

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[6] Georgia and Connecticut reported no achievement data. Data reported from the following SEAs could not be compared with data from other states: Puerto Rico used Spanish-language tests that differed from English-language achievement tests used by the other SEAs; the District of Columbia reported test results in grade equivalents rather than NCEs; Oklahoma provided data at only three grade levels; and Maine, New Hampshire, and Maryland did not report posttest scores.

[7] Personnel in one ED staff office reported that they do not use the achievement data from SEAs in their Chapter 1 analyses because of doubts about the accuracy of the data. They said that the data may be useful for comparisons over time within a state but not for comparisons among states or aggregation across states.

- In a number of states, districts shift from one evaluation cycle to another at their own discretion, without coordinating their data collection with the state's overall sampling plan.

- One state did not collect Chapter 1 data on the race of Chapter 1 participants, so it used the racial proportions that a neighboring state reported on its Chapter 1 application. After examining the results, SEA officials realized that they probably had more Asian-American students enrolled in Chapter 1 projects than their "borrowed" estimates reflected, so the SEA used guesswork to increase its reported enrollment of Asian-Americans.

- Another state that has one large urban district obtains participation data from the district every other year and does not compensate for the omission of the district in the off years. As a result, the reported Chapter 1 participation figures vary widely from one year to the next.

Even more pervasive than these problems are instances of carelessness in the reporting of Chapter 1 data. According to ED staff who regularly review the data SEAs submit, some SEA reports look as though they are not checked for accuracy or reasonableness (e.g., columns may not equal the reported total or totals may be unreasonably high or low) or for correct transcription (e.g., numbers may be transposed).[8]

These reviewers note that, although most of these problems have come to light relatively recently, they have no way of knowing whether the problems themselves are recent or only recently discovered. CEP staff point out that the problems arising in SEA and LEA evaluations tend to be less serious than those arising several

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[8] An observation pertinent to this review comes from one of the TAC directors who said that the data that LEAs send to SEAs are generally of good quality. According to this respondent, the errors and sloppiness occur at the SEA level.

years ago. In any case, these problems build a strong argument for conducting a thorough critique of the overall quality of the Chapter 1 achievement data. This critique could also usefully examine the Chapter 1 participation data, even though fewer problems have come to light from those reports. If such a review indicates that the quality of the data is acceptable, a second review should be conducted of SEAs' and LEAs' use of the data to assess and improve their Chapter 1 programs. Information bearing on this review is available from several of the state and local case studies conducted for the National Assessment of Chapter 1. The findings of these reviews should be used to indicate areas of needed change in the Chapter 1 evaluation system.

Issues Concerning the Types of Evaluation Data That Are Needed

Another set of issues concerns the types of Chapter 1 participation and effectiveness data that are most useful to evaluation users. With regard to Chapter 1 participation data, CEP staff report that they have regular needs for data on (1) numbers of students receiving Chapter 1 instruction in each of the designated instructional and supportive areas, (2) participants' grade levels, and (3) to a lesser extent, their racial/ethnic affiliation. By contrast, they have virtually no needs for data on students' age or gender. None of our other respondents reported needs for data on students' age or gender. Dougherty reports that Chapter 1 coordinators in SEAs find data on participants' race, age, and gender to be unnecessary "since there was no allegation of race or sex discrimination in the program; and

age data largely duplicated data . . . on the grade level distribution of Chapter 1 students" (1986, p. 149).

With regard to achievement data, congressional staff interviewed for this study said that they need information on the educational achievement of Chapter 1 participants, and they need it on a regular, periodic basis. They said that they do not necessarily need state-level data and thus that the results of national sample studies administered by ED would be acceptable to them.[9] We note, however, that members of Congress sometimes ask ED for information on the Chapter 1 performance of their own states, suggesting that they might be less willing than their staffs to do without state Chapter 1 data.

A different perspective on what types of effectiveness data are needed comes from a senior CEP official. According to this individual, the reading and mathematics achievement of Chapter 1 participants has received excessive attention from policy makers and evaluators, to the neglect of other, equally valuable categories of outcome information. Types of national effectiveness data that should be obtained, according to this respondent, include (1) the performance of Chapter 1 participants in instructional areas other than those that Chapter 1 addresses, (2) participants' retention in school, and (3) their school behavior, including their self-concept and disciplinary problems. Other ED staff note, however, that it may

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[9] This flexibility contrasts with earlier positions expressed by the congressional committees, in which members indicated that they did not trust the results of federally sponsored national studies because of possible political intervention to influence the conclusions reached in the studies (Reisner in Reisner, Alkin, Boruch, Linn, & Millman, 1982, p. 89).

not be reasonable to expect Chapter 1 to produce measurable outcomes in these areas, given the relatively small amounts of supplementary instruction that Chapter 1 provides.

III. FEDERAL ADMINISTRATION OF CHAPTER 1 PROGRAM IMPROVEMENT

The major new federal initiative in Chapter 1 since 1981 focuses on program improvement. With a relatively small financial investment, ED has launched several activities intended to improve the classroom experiences of Chapter 1's five million participants. In this section, we describe (1) the major events since 1981 in the federal administration of Chapter 1 program improvement activities, (2) the program improvement activities that ED is currently implementing, and (3) the opportunities and problems characterizing this series of initiatives.

A problem that arises in describing Chapter 1 program improvement is the difficulty of defining the term precisely. Three slightly different meanings that are attached to the term most frequently are (1) the general upgrading of Chapter 1 instruction, often based on principles described in the "effective schools" research; (2) the provision of intensive assistance to Chapter 1 projects having particularly poor records of performance; and (3) the use of evaluative information to identify instructional needs and suggest strategies for improving the achievement of Chapter 1 students.

Events Since 1981 in the Federal Administration of Program Improvement Activities

To some extent, ECIA represented a reaction to the compliance model of federal program administration in compensatory education. In place of implementing the federal program through regulation and penalty, as envisioned in the 1978 amendments to Title I, Chapter 1

reflects an emphasis on encouragement and assistance. The program improvement initiative has been a centerpiece of that effort, operating alongside other federal activities to promote Chapter 1 compliance.

In school year 1983-84, the Department launched "the Secretary's Initiative to Improve the Quality of Chapter 1 Projects" with the award of 21 one-year grants, totalling $1 million, to support projects involving 33 SEAs. ED directed grantees to focus their activities on identifying, implementing, and disseminating approaches to improve Chapter 1 project quality. To illustrate the types of projects funded, a program announcement issued after the grant competition included the following three grant descriptions (selected at random):

> Virginia ($85,000)
> The application submitted by the Virginia Department of Education proposed activities in five states (Va., Del., Md., Pa., and W. Va.) and the District of Columbia, the involvement of two regional laboratories (Appalachia Educational Laboratory and Research for Better Schools), and evaluation support from their Chapter 1 TACs. The consortium proposed to develop a program improvement guide (the Mid-Atlantic Guide for Improving Chapter 1), train 120 Chapter 1 staff members in its use, field test the guide in 80 local program sites, and institutionalize the use of the guide in the state monitoring process.

> Utah ($12,492)
> The Utah project is designed to analyze the cost-effectiveness of parent-child tutoring programs in kindergarten/first-grade reading. The project will: evaluate the cost-effectiveness of using parents as tutors; develop procedures to monitor and document parent training; and produce documents for parents and educators.

Iowa ($69,965)
The Iowa Department of Public Instruction proposes to identify effective instructional program elements in the classroom. Over the past three years, TIERS has led to the identification of consistently high achieving and consistently low achieving projects. The amounts and kinds of within-class variables will be examined to determine those factors of compensatory reading programs which consistently contribute to success or failure.

In the following year ED redirected its program improvement activities in Chapter 1. For school year 1984-85 ED initiated a three-part program intended to (1) provide technical assistance on Chapter 1 program improvement to all the states through the TACs, (2) synthesize and disseminate information regarding successful and cost-effective Chapter 1 projects, and (3) identify and publicize particularly successful local projects. ED directed the TACs to devote 25 percent of their federal contract funds to supporting this initiative. The Department asked SEAs to nominate particularly successful local projects from their states, using the TACs to help in evaluating projects and developing project descriptions. From this list of state nominated projects, a federally appointed panel of outside experts selected 116 for special recognition, based on criteria drawn from the "effective schools" research.

The criteria were developed with the participation of Chapter 1 practitioners and experts in compensatory education and cognitive research. Because the research focuses on characteristics of schools, critics within CEP and the ED Office of Educational Research and Improvement have said that it may not be relevant to categorical programs, such as Chapter 1, that serve only some of the students within a school and often span activities in several schools. The

director of CEP reported that CEP is currently monitoring several studies that may lead to refinements in the criteria.

The projects selected for recognition are described in the "Effective Compensatory Education Sourcebook" (Griswold, Cotton, & Hansen, 1986), a two-volume compendium of research findings and project descriptions prepared by staff from one of the TACs. Examples of Chapter 1 projects selected for recognition include the following, summarized from the "Sourcebook" (chosen at random):

Bloomington (Ind.) Public Schools seventh-grade project

This project focuses on skill development in reading, composition, spelling, spoken language, and geography, along with study skills. Instruction includes students' use of computers for language arts practice and word processing. The project emphasizes (1) the efficient use of students' time in class and (2) parental assistance with regular instruction and summer learning activities.

Salisbury (N.C.) City Schools reading and language arts project

Pairs of teachers (one Chapter 1 teacher and one regular classroom teacher) provide reading and language arts instruction in kindergarten through ninth grade using a Chapter 1 replacement model. Reading consultants assist project teachers in administrative and instructional planning. Instruction is provided in small group settings and arranged to avoid the personal stigma and other problems that sometimes accompany pullout programs.

Alpine (Utah) School District first- and second-grade project

Specially trained fifth and sixth graders tutor first and second graders under the direction of a teacher and counselor in each participating school. The project focuses on developing reading skills and student self-esteem. Parents are involved in supporting their children's learning and in suggesting curricular improvements.

Following the announcement of the local projects selected for recognition, ED sponsored regional dissemination and training meetings for SEAs and other activities. SEAs were encouraged to conduct similar activities for their LEAs, and, according to PES respondents, most did so with assistance from the TACs.

In school year 1985-86, ED continued the activities initiated in the preceding year. The Department again asked SEAs to nominate effective Chapter 1 projects for the national recognition program, and from this list ED selected 130 projects. This round of nomination and selection differed from the preceding year's in three ways--(1) ED asked SEAs to consider all compensatory education projects in their states, not just Chapter 1 projects, in selecting local nominees;[10] (2) the Department used a more formal selection process, with training for panelists and rating forms; and (3) CEP examined the compliance status of nominated projects (especially in light of Aguilar v. Felton) before the panel made its selections. These projects will be described in a third volume of the "Sourcebook," which is currently being prepared by the developers of the first two volumes.

ED's Current Administrative Activities in Program Improvement

Program improvement activities in Chapter 1 are handled at the federal level by personnel in CEP and PES. Within CEP, one person works full time on program improvement, with support from a branch

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[10] SEAs nominated only Chapter 1 projects for recognition, despite ED's suggestion that they look beyond the federal program.

chief. PES personnel monitored the state grants, assist in the selection of the recognition projects, and coordinate training and dissemination activities. The PES staff member responsible for the TAC contracts monitors the TACs' work in promoting program improvement, described in Section IV.

ED plans to conduct another round of project recognition activities in the 1986-87 school year; no decision has been made on whether any subsequent round of project recognition activities will be held. CEP staff said that they would like SEAs to continue the program improvement initiative by developing statewide program improvement plans for Chapter 1, and they have directed the TACs to work with SEAs to develop these plans.[11] (Indeed, ED asked the TACs to include the development of state program improvement plans in their most recent letters of agreement with each SEA.) As described by a senior CEP official, the purpose of the plans is to help SEAs (1) implement strategies for upgrading the performance of LEAs whose Chapter 1 projects show particularly low gains and (2) work with all Chapter 1 LEAs in designing and implementing programs that reflect the findings of research on effective services to educationally disadvantaged children. Because no statutory authority exists requiring state Chapter 1 improvement plans, CEP understands that this idea can be promoted only on a voluntary basis. Even so, CEP staff report

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[11] PES staff concurred with the priority on state improvement plans and said they would also like the program to sponsor validation reviews of the Chapter 1 projects previously selected for recognition. The purpose of these reviews would be to determine (1) whether the projects were continuing to be implemented as they were at the time they were selected and (2) the effects of each project on participants and on the LEA.

that 18 states have already developed and adopted such plans (involving varying levels of specificity) on their own or with TAC aid.

CEP's interest in state improvement plans reflects a desire to help SEAs and LEAs move towards increased commitments to program improvement goals and methods. As an indicator of movement in this direction, CEP staff point to the fact that several state Chapter 1 policy/procedures manuals now include sections on program improvement. Some of the states' LEA applications also now include requirements to address the "effective schools" criteria adopted for the Chapter 1 project recognition program. CEP staff were not able to comment on the extent to which these activities have led to changes in LEA practice.

To promote improvement goals in CEP's own administrative activities, the CEP staff person responsible for program improvement has developed a one-page monitoring guide for use by federal Chapter 1 program review teams. The guide identifies the following areas for inquiry during Chapter 1 program reviews of SEAs:

- Chapter 1 staff's familiarity with the program improvement initiative,
- SEA's plan for program improvement,
- SEA's procedures for participating in the Chapter 1 LEA recognition program,
- SEA's use of evaluation data to identify low achieving projects and potential Joint Dissemination Review Panel submissions,
- SEA's dissemination plan, and
- SEA's workshop and conference agenda.

Senior CEP staff expect review teams to use the guide when they conduct their SEA and LEA visits, and program managers are currently revising it on the basis of CEP experience with it to date. We were told that the teams decide whether to use the current guide depending on (1) the particular interests of the review team members and (2) the other priorities to be addressed in the state.

Opportunities and Problems in the Federal Administration of Program Improvement

The Chapter 1 program improvement initiative has roots in both federal legislative action and grass-roots interests in educational reform. At the legislative level, ECIA reflected a broad trend towards deregulation, burden reduction, and less federal involvement in local program activities; the Chapter 1 program improvement activities are consistent with that outlook. The Chapter 1 program improvement effort also responds to the national trend supporting educational reform, a movement that has sparked growing interest in schools and classrooms. By adopting some of the goals of this movement, the Chapter 1 improvement initiative has endeavored to direct attention to the quality of instruction provided to Chapter 1 recipients, who include many of the nation's neediest students.

A major problem impeding adoption of Chapter 1 program improvement priorities is that instructional improvement has never been an explicit component of the SEA's mission in the administration of Chapter 1. Because the SEA role in Chapter 1 has historically focused on compliance, most SEAs have staffed their Chapter 1 offices mainly with persons skilled in that area. State Chapter 1 offices

have been seriously limited in their ability to add staff members knowledgeable in the program improvement areas highlighted by the federal initiative, due to (1) continuing SEA responsibilities for Chapter 1 compliance and (2) constraints on Chapter 1 administrative spending.

The limited administrative funds have also impeded SEAs in taking advantage of ED's own initiatives. As one state Chapter 1 coordinator said to us, the Chapter 1 initiatives are "fine to a point," but they stop short. "We know where our good projects are," this coordinator said, but "it doesn't do anyone any good to know where the other good ones are [in other states], and then give us no money to learn any more about them." This respondent said that LEAs generally cannot foot the bill for staff and travel costs to visit an ED-recognized project.

A third problem arises from the relationship between some SEAs and LEAs. In some instances, especially when the LEA has a very large enrollment, the LEA may not be willing to accept suggestions or assistance from the SEA (according to interviews with state Chapter 1 coordinators and TAC directors). This is particularly likely to be true if the LEA's involvement with the SEA is voluntary, as in the case of Chapter 1 program improvement.

Despite the problems, this relationship between a federal program initiative and a larger national priority creates special opportunities in Chapter 1. In particular, it may make it possible to foster strengthened state and local commitments to improving compensatory education programs. Development of these strengthened

commitments and tapping the broader reform objectives of SEAs and LEAs represent a major challenge confronting Chapter 1's federal administrators.[12]

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[12] A report being prepared by B. J. Turnbull discusses the relationship between Chapter 1 and state educational improvement initiatives.

IV. FEDERAL ADMINISTRATION OF CHAPTER 1 TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE

ED provides several types of technical assistance to SEAs and LEAs implementing Chapter 1 programs. These include technical assistance in interpreting and complying with programmatic requirements, such as those concerned with school and student selection and the provision of services to private school students. ED also provides technical assistance through telephone consultations, national and regional conferences, attendance at state sponsored meetings, and sponsorship of the TACs. In this report we focus mainly on the TACs, the main federal vehicle for delivering technical assistance in the evaluation and qualitative improvement of Chapter 1 programs.

Initiated in 1976, the TACs have seen their mission change with the shifting federal administrative role in evaluation and program improvement. The services they provide have changed as well, reflecting their evolving mission. Because they serve as a link between federal policy in Chapter 1 and state and local practice in evaluation and program improvement, their experiences are a useful barometer of the extent to which SEAs and LEAs are reacting to and acting on federal priorities in Chapter 1.

In this section, we describe (1) the major changes since 1981 in the federal administration of the Chapter 1 TACs, (2) the technical assistance ED currently provides, and (3) the opportunities and problems characterizing this area of federal Chapter 1 administration.

Changes Since 1981 in the Federal Administration of Chapter 1 Technical Assistance

In 1974 Congress charged the Commissioner of Education with providing technical assistance to SEAs "to enable them to assist LEAs in the development and application of a systematic evaluation of programs in accordance with the [required Title I evaluation] models" (Section 151 of the 1978 ESEA amendments). To implement this requirement, the U.S. Office of Education established 10 TACs in 1976, with each serving a designated geographic region. During the decade since, the agenda of the TACs has reflected the events and issues shaping Title I and Chapter 1 evaluation.[13]

With ECIA's repeal of certain key evaluation requirements and elimination of the specific authorization for technical assistance for evaluation, the role of the TACs shifted somewhat. PES and CEP directed the TACs to reduce their emphasis on training SEA and LEA staff in the implementation of the evaluation models and to enlarge their efforts in assisting SEAs and LEAs to use evaluation results to examine and improve their Chapter 1 programs. Changes within CEP encouraged this transition away from the TACs' more narrow focus on evaluation practices. In the 1970s, CEP had employed program specialists to provide technical assistance and other services, such as training and materials development, in areas such as basic skills

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[13] Stonehill and Groves (1983) describe the relationship between the TACs' agenda and the events and issues affecting Chapter 1 evaluation, with a particular emphasis on the role of technical assistance in improving the local utility of Chapter 1 evaluations. What they characterized as an issue of local utility (i.e., how LEAs can use evaluations to improve Chapter 1 projects) in 1983 is today a component of the Department's focus on program improvement.

instruction, educational needs assessment, and parent involvement (Funkhouser, Michie, & Moore, 1987). Reductions in ED staffing in the early 1980s eliminated these positions, though not CEP's responsibilities in these areas, forcing CEP—and hence SEA Chapter 1 staff and evaluators—to turn to the TACs for technical assistance in areas other than evaluation.

Other changes in the TACs resulted in part from the studies of TAC operations conducted for ED. The first study (Millman, Paisley, Rogers, Sanders, & Womer, 1978) found that the technical assistance program was "working and working well" (p. 57). The report recommended certain changes concerned mainly with improving the federal administration of the TACs. The recommendations included suggestions to (1) extend the TAC funding cycle from one to three years, (2) expand the scope of TAC activity to include technical assistance for local program improvement, (3) establish a uniform system of cost/effort reporting, and (4) encourage cooperation among TACs. In the next cycle of TAC awards, steps were taken to implement the recommended changes.[14]

A 1979 Fast Response Survey of LEAs conducted by the National Center for Education Statistics reinforced the recommendation of Millman et al. to include a new TAC focus on program improvement (Goor, 1979). The survey asked LEAs about their expected needs for technical assistance in conducting Title I evaluations. The area in

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[14] In response to the third recommendation, federal project officers instituted a reporting system whereby TACs report quarterly on their client contacts, categorizing their contacts according to service method and topic (see Tables 2 and 3).

which the highest percent of LEAs (34 percent) reported needs was "evaluation for continuing program improvement."

A second major study of the TACs (Millman in Reisner et al., 1982) reported four major findings:

- The content of the assistance that TACs provided had shifted from implementing the RMC models and TIERS reporting system to improving the quality and utility of Chapter 1 evaluation data.
- States varied widely in the amount of TAC services they received, and TACs varied widely in the amount and types of services they provided.
- The amount of field service TACs provided was low relative to TAC expenditures.
- TAC clients were very satisfied with TAC services and wanted them to continue.

At about the same time as this report--though unrelated to it--ED spending on the TACs dropped. Table 1 displays total ED spending for the TACs since their inception and the percent of total Title I or Chapter 1 spending represented by the TACs.

Table 1
ED Spending on the TACs, 1976-77 through 1986-87

School Year	Amount	Percent of Title I/ Chapter 1 Spending
1976-77	$1,590,845	0.1%
1977-78	4,087,644	0.2
1978-79	5,297,119	0.2
1979-80	6,648,639	0.2
1980-81	8,508,050	0.3
1981-82	8,260,388	0.3
1982-83	5,286,232	0.2
1983-84	5,596,979	0.2
1984-85	4,170,000	0.1
1985-86	3,625,000	0.1
1986-87	3,600,000	0.1

The TAC reductions since 1980-81 reflect both overall cutbacks in Chapter 1 allocations and also specific reductions in TAC funding. This is demonstrated by the fact that TAC spending has declined as a percent of total Chapter 1 appropriations since 1981, at the same time as the absolute amount of TAC spending has decreased. According to respondents in PES, current TAC staffing overall stands at 29 full-time equivalent (FTE) staff members.

The types of activities undertaken by the TACs reflect the reductions in TAC funding. Analysis of self-reported data from the TACs, presented in Table 2, indicates that the percentage of TAC contacts with SEA and LEA clients made through workshops and on-site consultations has decreased since 1982, and the percentage of contacts made through telephone calls has increased. The percentage made through correspondence has fluctuated, increasing in the most recent year. This pattern reflects the TACs' adoption of less costly means of conveying assistance, as a replacement for personnel- and time-intensive workshops and on-site consultations.

Table 2

Percent of TAC Contacts by Service Delivery Method, 1982-83 through 1985-86

Method	1982-83	1983-84	1984-85	1985-86[a]
Workshops	13%	11%	10%	6%
On-site consultations	22	24	20	11
Telephone calls	37	41	47	52
Correspondence	28	24	23	31

[a] Data for 1985-86 are incomplete. Percents are based on data from October 1985 through June 1986.

The types of issues addressed through TAC services have also changed during the same period, as described in Table 3. As might be expected due to shifts in federal requirements and growing local familiarity with Chapter 1 evaluation activities, services concerned with evaluation procedures, uses, and reporting declined as a percentage of all contacts with clients, while the percentage of services concerned with program improvement and testing issues increased. The percent of TAC contacts related to technology use (e.g., uses of microcomputers for Chapter 1 administrative and instructional purposes) also decreased, while the percent of contacts on data quality rose and then declined.

Table 3

Percent of TAC Contacts by Service Topic, 1982-83 through 1985-86

Service Topic	1982-83	1983-84	1984-85	1985-86[a]
Evaluation procedures	37%	26%	27%	29%
Evaluation uses and reporting	14	10	8	9
Program improvement	10	18	25	30
Testing issues	19	21	21	23
Technology uses	14	14	7	2
Data quality	6	11	12	7

[a] Data for 1985-86 are incomplete. Percentages are based on data from October 1985 through June 1986.

ED's Current Administrative Activities in Chapter 1 Technical Assistance

PES respondents report that they devote 0.5 FTE to administering the TAC contracts. Their administrative responsibilities regularly include (1) reviewing TAC plans and products, (2) answering questions from the TACs, (3) responding to SEA inquiries regarding the TACs, and (4) attending TAC meetings.

All ED and TAC staff we questioned regarding current TAC activities reported that ED continues to require the TACs to focus services on improving the quality of Chapter 1 instructional programs. The TAC directors said that at least one-half of their total resources are used for services in this area. A recent list of new workshops and services publicized by one TAC indicates this emphasis, as follows:

- Research on reading comprehension,
- Effective Chapter 1 leadership,
- Early childhood tests,
- Coordination of the regular and Chapter 1 program,
- Improving study skills (workshop for teachers and parents), and
- Program improvement in Chapter 1.

Only one of the topics on the list--early childhood tests--is concerned solely with evaluation.

In their implementation of the program improvement agenda, the TACs are serving as a communications channel between ED and state and local educational agencies, according to CEP and SEA respondents. Indeed, much of ED's focus on program improvement has been

implemented through the TACs, rather than through regulations, non-regulatory guidance, or directives. For example, ED is encouraging TACs to work with SEAs to identify LEAs with particularly poor records of Chapter 1 performance, in order to assist these LEAs to assess and upgrade their program activities. Senior CEP and PES officials and TAC directors understand that these intensive services to a small number of LEAs appear relatively inefficient in TAC measures of client contacts. Nevertheless, they believe that these services are central to improving Chapter 1 performance.

Our interviews with TAC directors indicated that working with SEAs to identify and assist poorly performing LEAs has proved a difficult assignment. The only SEAs prepared to direct TACs towards LEAs with poor performance records are those few SEAs that have already adopted statewide improvement programs and are targeting poorly performing LEAs as part of that effort. Other SEAs are reluctant to identify any LEAs as having ineffective Chapter 1 programs. One TAC director described an especially difficult situation in which the SEA asked the TAC to work with several LEAs with poor performance records but would not tell the LEAs why they had been selected to receive special TAC help. In this instance and in other similar situations in which the SEA has selected an LEA to receive special help, TAC directors report difficulties in securing cooperation from the LEA and sometimes a lack of interest in the services the TAC can provide.

As the example indicates, the TACs have found themselves promoting the federal program improvement initiative, which has minimal

statutory authority, in SEAs with varying interests and authority. If an SEA is reluctant to adopt Chapter 1 program improvement priorities, the TAC can do little beyond persuasion and coaxing. Similarly, if SEA staff are committed to program improvement but hesitate to direct their districts to improve their Chapter 1 programs, the TAC's effectiveness will be limited.

Several ED staff members said in interviews that some TACs are not well equipped to offer program improvement services. They expressed a perception that some TAC staff members are uncomfortable providing technical assistance on program improvement, mainly because their training and expertise are primarily in evaluation.[15] PES staff responsible for supervising the TAC contracts said that TAC resumes were reviewed as part of the selection of TAC contractors to ensure that staff members in each TAC are qualified to assist in program improvement as well as in evaluation and testing. PES staff also report that they review the resumes of new staff to determine whether they have training or work experience in areas such as reading, instructional design, curriculum, and administration.

In our interviews, TAC directors said that their staff are competent to offer technical assistance in program improvement, primarily because of their work experiences, interests, and familiarity with state and local staff. Indicating the difficulty of ED's job in

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[15] This assessment is supported by the fact that, for the most part, the same organizations have operated the TACs since the reduction from ten to four TACs in 1982, even though the organizational umbrellas for several TACs have shifted since 1982. Moreover, the four TACs chosen in 1982 were essentially consortia of organizations (and individuals) operating TACs under the previous configuration of ten TACs.

assessing the qualifications of TAC staff, one TAC director said, "I know our people are trained as evaluators and have done lots of evaluations. I also know the people on our staff who do really good program improvement. But there's no such thing as a master's in program improvement, so I'm not sure what [ED staff] are going to be looking for on resumes."

Based on his interviews with 50 state Chapter 1 coordinators, Dougherty (1985) concludes that "SEAs consider the TACs to be an extremely valuable resource in improving Chapter 1 quality" (p. 165). Dougherty raises a concern, however, that ED's program improvement initiative is competing with the SEAs' own priorities for scarce TAC resources; prompted by this concern, he urges an increase in overall TAC funding.

Differing levels of state interest and authority and of TAC staff abilities have produced variations in TAC program improvement activities, both across the TACs and within the region a single TAC covers. The following types of program improvement activities, drawn from our interviews with TAC staff, provide examples of the variation:

- In one state, where the SEA exercises little authority over local operations, the TAC conducts workshops to introduce evaluation purposes, methods, and requirements to LEA staff who have not previously implemented evaluations. As part of the workshops, TAC staff discuss how local staff can use their evaluation results to improve their Chapter 1 projects.

- Another TAC helped a state to identify four strong and four weak districts. TAC staff developed instruments to survey three broad areas—coordination between Chapter 1 and the regular program, curriculum, and parental involvement. The survey results are being used to assess characteristics of the weak and strong

districts. The TAC anticipates using the analysis to guide their work with weak districts in improving their Chapter 1 projects.

- Another TAC disseminates extensive information about program improvement (e.g., how to improve reading instruction, how to increase students' time on task, and how and when to use observational instruments) and has offered program improvement workshops on about 50 different topics. Only one state in this region has become actively involved in program improvement, however. Although this SEA has a reputation for emphasizing Chapter 1 compliance rather than program content, it has identified six low performing districts and has asked the TAC to provide special help to those districts. The SEA has also developed a comprehensive data base on its Chapter 1 projects, and with data (and some new staff) the agency's interest and activities in program improvement have grown quickly.

- A fourth TAC has hosted a number of workshops throughout its region, attends state sponsored meetings to make presentations on program improvement, and shares information across states and districts. This TAC has been less successful in obtaining SEA cooperation to focus on low performing districts. The director said, "When [ED] first told us to do it, we tried to obey. We're good soldiers. We went out and approached the states. We hit a lot of resistance. Then we realized, 'why waste resources on something that will have zero impact?' No one will improve unless they really want to." Only one state in this region has tried to target improvement efforts at low performing districts. In this state, SEA staff searched a three-year file to identify the districts that were achieving significantly below the state's average; the SEA then asked the TAC to provide assistance to those districts. The TAC director said, "Each district was coerced into participating. One remains absolutely nonenthusiastic."

Several of the Chapter 1 coordinators and TAC directors we interviewed said that program improvement will become an integral part of Chapter 1 operations only if the federal government takes a more direct role. Their recommendations include (1) adding statutory language requiring SEAs to conduct program improvement activities,

(2) designating certain Chapter 1 funds specifically for program improvement,[16] and (3) maintaining the distinction for TAC activities that separates evaluation and program improvement.

The program improvement emphasis has not eliminated the TACs' work in Chapter 1 evaluation, however. Indeed, ECIA's reduction in the SEA administrative set-aside led some SEAs to reduce their in-house capacity in Chapter 1 evaluation, hence prompting greater reliance on TAC services. (For some SEAs, evaluation was an easy area to cut, because they knew they could turn to the TACs to fill in.) TAC directors report that, in comparison with previous years, SEAs are more likely now to request in-depth assistance in all phases of Chapter 1 evaluation and reporting, services that TACs may provide under their contracts with ED. In addition, SEAs are more likely to rely on the TACs to carry out all of the training and supervision of local Chapter 1 evaluation personnel, according to the TAC directors.

Opportunities and Problems in the Federal Administration of Chapter 1 Technical Assistance

One view of the TACs' effectiveness is available from a 1984 survey of state Chapter 1 coordinators conducted by the coordinators' national association (National Association of State Chapter 1 Coordinators, n.d.). The 48 coordinators responding to the survey reported high levels of satisfaction with the services the TACs provide. In general, they reported greater satisfaction with the TACs'

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[16] In discussions with ED staff, some Chapter 1 state and local coordinators have recommended statutory changes that would earmark Chapter 1 reallocation funds for program improvement.

assistance in improving evaluation quality (58 percent rated them "very effective" and 35 percent said they were "okay") than with their help in program improvement (33 percent said they were "very effective" and 46 percent said they were "okay"). Overall, the state coordinators found the TACs to be responsive in their delivery of services and sensitive to state needs.

Survey respondents identified four areas they expected would generate the greatest upcoming needs for assistance. These were program improvement evaluation, quality control, information on appropriate testing procedures, and assistance in completing Chapter 1 evaluations.

While reflecting a positive view of the TACs, the survey results point out the continuing diversity in SEA needs for technical assistance. Given the limited resources available for the provision of TAC services and reports of SEAs' growing reliance on the TACs to carry out evaluation training and data reporting, ED may need to establish more stringent priorities for the expenditure of TAC resources.

In addition, clarification may be needed in defining "program improvement" under Chapter 1 and the appropriate limits to activities in this area. For example, are there points at which assistance with Chapter 1 program improvement runs afoul of the Department of Education Organization Act (Section 103), which prohibits the federal "exercise [of] any direction . . . over the curriculum, program of instruction, administration, or personnel of any educational institution. . ." ? Concern over this provision (and a similar provision in

the General Education Provisions Act prior to the formation of ED) deterred TAC involvement in program improvement activities before ED launched its Chapter 1 improvement initiative in 1983.[17]

At the same time the categorical nature of Chapter 1 has limited the TACs in the types of assistance they can provide in program improvement. Although much recent research on improving instructional programs focuses on school characteristics and activities, Chapter 1 projects only rarely involve the whole school. Because the projects usually involve only a portion of a school's students and staff and because TACs are authorized only to assist in improving Chapter 1 programs, TACs are constrained in the scope and completeness of the assistance they can provide. A solution recommended by one person interviewed for this study would be to authorize TACs to provide technical assistance on improving services to Chapter 1 students, assistance that might extend beyond the Chapter 1 program itself. Under this proposal, TACs could provide technical assistance in improving any educational services provided to Chapter 1 participants, whether the services were supported by Chapter 1 or not.

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[17] CEP staff said that TAC assistance entails no "direction" over educational activities at all but only assistance and sometimes pressure to implement Chapter 1 projects in accordance with the law.

V. CONCLUSIONS

The preceding description of the federal administration of Chapter 1 evaluation, program improvement, and technical assistance indicates an ambitious array of federally prompted activities implemented in a changing environment. These factors combine to suggest that, however desirable the goals of these federal administrative activities may be, their successful implementation will not be easy. Indeed, any assessment of their success, which must measure the effects of these federal activities on local program implementation, should take account of the time and other resources needed to accomplish the voluntary changes they envision.

Our examination of the federal implementation of these administrative changes indicates certain areas where it is particularly important to learn if the voluntary strategies are working. One such area is the state and local collection and reporting of Chapter 1 achievement data. Now that SEAs and LEAs are no longer required to follow regulated procedures for collecting and reporting these data, it would be useful to assess the quality of the data that the states are providing to ED and the extent to which SEAs and LEAs are making use of these data on their own. If the data are of poor quality or if SEAs and LEAs make little use of them, ED should consider dropping their request that TIERS data be submitted in fulfillment of states' evaluation responsibilities. The system is too costly to be continued out of habit alone.

As part of the review of states' reporting requirements, it would be useful to determine if all the current reporting categories on Chapter 1 participants are indeed necessary. Our interviews suggested that three current categories produce useful data--participants' grade level, Chapter 1 services, and racial/ethnic group. Data on participants' age and gender appeared less useful at either federal or state levels.

A second area where it would be useful to determine if current approaches are working is in the federal attempt to link Chapter 1 improvement activities to the larger educational reform movement. If states and local school districts are indeed incorporating compensatory education goals into their plans and activities for improving instructional services generally, then it is reasonable to expect that the initiative and ideas for improvement in compensatory education can come from SEAs and LEAs and that the federal role can continue to emphasize financial support and encouragement, rather than requirement. If, however, disadvantaged students are receiving less than their full share of attention under educational reform--or if they are being slighted by some SEAs and LEAs though not others--the current voluntary strategies may not be adequate, and some stronger requirements may need to be adopted in Chapter 1.

The third area for further consideration is possible refinements in the TACs' responsibilities. At present, SEAs decide on the mix of evaluation and program improvement assistance they receive from the TACs and the content of that assistance, with some encouragement from

the TACs and ED. Given current resource constraints, ED may want to establish more explicit priorities for TAC assistance.

We consider the federal administrative activities described in this report to be ambitious because they are intended to promote the voluntary upgrading of narrowly defined services delivered to a needy population. These changes from the federal implementation of Title I have meant that ED is relying on state and local intentions to assess and improve federal compensatory education services to a much greater degree than before. Though ED has provided some new resources to help SEAs and LEAs make these improvements (e.g., a year's worth of small SEA grants, special services through the TACs, certain types of regulatory relief), the new resources have not been extensive, especially in light of Chapter 1's status as the nation's largest categorical program in elementary and secondary education.

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